

A community of more than 6.000 people -- refugees, migrants and locals -- comes together to fight social isolation.

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Social isolation is a critical problem in our society. The COVID-19 pandemic intensified this problem, especially for the most vulnerable populations, such as the elderly, migrants and refugees.

SPEAK, a social startup that promotes inclusive societies via language and cultural exchange experiences, moved their language sessions to a free online model 2 months ago to fight the isolation barrier faced by many due to the COVID-19 pandemic. SPEAK is connecting more than 6.000 people around the world, helping break the isolation barrier through language and cultural exchange experiences. More than 25 languages are being shared, ranging from more well-known languages such as English and Spanish, to lesser-known languages such as Marathi and Curdo.

The positive impact of this model extends to refugee support too. With the help of the community, over the past couple of months around 300 refugees in Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Syria and the United Kingdom have participated in language and culture exchange experiences.

Maria Eduarda, a doctor and participant at SPEAK, shared her experience: "SPEAK has been a great help in my daily life. As a health professional, it is difficult for me to have the opportunity to learn a language in an intensive way without an online solution. During this pandemic, although I'm working every day at the hospital, I spend my free time online with SPEAK. I'm learning a lot and meeting really interesting people in the language groups. In these strange times that we live, SPEAK brings me a sense of normality, allowing me to socialize with people from all over the world and find out so much more about other cultures. I'm delighted to be part of this community! My experience with SPEAK has been exceptional!"

Ahmed, a refugee from Iraq, also shared his experience: "I am grateful that SPEAK is helping me and my family learn a language. The sessions they offer are great and make learning easy. We love how the sessions are hosted and appreciate SPEAK making us feel at home. We are very thankful for the help."

Everyone can sign up to share or learn a language, and get to know new cultures, at www.speak.social.

SPEAK was founded in Portugal in 2014. SPEAK's sessions are now being hosted in 23 cities in 11 different countries. SPEAK promotes the social integration of migrants and refugees through two experiences: 1) language groups, where anyone can learn or improve a language, learn about new cultures as well as share their language and culture with others and 2) multicultural and community-organized events.

More than 36,000 people are already part of SPEAK, with 175 nationalities represented. Last year, SPEAK won third place in the final of the [Chivas Venture](#) competition and was recently one of the winners of the [European Google Impact Challenge](#).

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